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Background Statement

Dr. Grace - EDU 402

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Throughout all my years of public schooling, there were specific expectations that were asked of me, and the school system, in order to build me into the student, and person that I am today. Each system, elementary, middle and high school, had different expectations of me and gave me different skills and lessons that I would use in multiple aspects of my life. In elementary school, the expectations of me were that I would learn the basics of things like math, english, science and history, and also learn public decency and skills that would carry us through the rest of our lives. We were expected to learn our ABCs, how to count to 50, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue and the water cycle, while also learning how to listen when others are speaking, sit still and treat other people that we ourselves wish to be treated. As I moved from elementary to middle school, not too much changed, as I went to a K-8 elementary school, but there were differences in our schooling and expectations. More than anything we were expected to meet new standards and expand on our already existing knowledge. A major difference in middle school compared to elementary school, is we were no longer all taught at the same level and the divide between “advanced” students and “regular” students started. Middle school also expects us to hone the skills that will help us be successful in high school. The divide of students only continues into high school, and the expectations of us as we enter high school is to start focusing on certain subjects, and also start to find the things that truly interest us, and of course, prepare us for college and the real world.

My parents always expected me to be successful in school. My mom had been an extremely successful student, honor roll, student government, and while she never expected me to match her level of success, she always expected me to do the best that I could be. My dad expected the same as well, especially because he, himself, hadn’t done very well in school. They both wanted me to be successful, and work the hardest that I could to be the best that I could be. The only time my parents ever expressed disappointment in my work, is if they thought that I was slacking and not working to the best of my abilities.

I never thought too much on what the business world’s expectations were of my schooling, but as I’ve gotten older, more and more businesses are expecting employees to have at least two year college degrees. This has a direct effect on the education system, now, instead of preparing students to enter the real world right away, students are being prepared to enter college and taught the skills to be successful in college environments.

I think my expectations for my own education started out high, but unfortunately lowered as I got into highschool and got closer and closer to graduating. I struggled a lot my sophomore and junior years of high school, and because of that, I started to expect less and less of myself. I went from wanting to make honor roll every semester, to being happy with low Bs and high Cs. There were still classes that I enjoyed and was extremely successful in, but I found myself getting lost in other classes and have difficulties staying in a place that I wanted to be. Unfortunately, I disliked many of my classes, and often found it hard to be successful in classes that I wasn’t enjoying.

Most of my classrooms in middle school and high school were the typical setup of rows of desks, all facing the front of the room where the board was. Usually the teacher dest was either at the front of the room, or in the back of the room behind all the students. Unfortunately for me, these kinds of set ups never quite worked for me, as I usually ended up in the middle of the room, where I often felt lost. However, there were some classes where the set up was different, a few of my middle school classes had table groups of desks, where your desk was with three other desks. However, my absolute favorite classroom set up was my AP English class junior and senior year of high school, which was in a horseshoe shape where my teacher sat on a stool in the middle of the horseshoe and could see all of us. I also enjoyed the way that my science classes were set up, with tables all facing the front of the room, as I liked having people directly next to me, who I could work with if need be.

Throughout all my years of schooling, I encountered many different teaching strategies that worked for and some that didn’t. One teaching strategy that I was always unsuccessful with, was straight lectures, my sophomore history class was the same every single day. We would come in, listen to a lecture for 45 minutes/an hour, write down keywords and definitions and just listen to our teaching talking for the entire hour. I never retained any of it, and it was very much a class that once we had the test, everything that we had learned completely disappeared from my memory. My favorite kinds of strategies were when we did hands on things, usually in groups. I’ve always loved working with my peers in class, and listening to other people’s ideas, so I always really loved when we got to do things as a group in class, even if that just meant, doing a multiple choice practice AP test in English individually, and then coming back together to talk about our answers.

Although, my absolute favorite strategy that I got to experience in high school came to me as a senior in highschool in my calculus class. I’ve never been too great at math, and struggled to get high C’s in my past two math classes, but I did very well in my senior calculus class, and I owe a lot of that success to this strategy. Every night, we would have a set of problems to do, but unlike all my other math classes, where the next day my teacher would stand at the front and idly go over certain problems, in this class, we went through every problem. Our teacher would split us up into teams of two, and would assign each of us a problem and we would have as much time as we needed to work through the problem, together, and could ask for help if we needed it. After every team was done, we would go around the room and each team would explain how they got the answer and go through every step. For me, learning from my peers was always extremely helpful, and this teacher always made sure that all of us had fundamental understandings of what we were doing before he let us move on.

Going to school in coastal Maine, there was not much by the way of racial diversity at my high school. I could count on two hands non white students that attended my high school, not counting the one year exchange students (as my senior, there were about 10 Chinese exchange students). About 98% of the student population at Boothbay were white, so for the most part, all of my classmates looked exactly like I did. However, there was a great range of socioeconomic statuses at my school, some students came from two parent families where both parents had well paying jobs, and then some lived with one parent who had a minimum wage job. Some students had a lot, and some had none, and a large percentage of students at Boothbay have free or reduced lunch.

When I was a senior in high school, my school was moving towards becoming a STEM school, with most classes being focused on science and technology and math, however, the arts and foreign language programs are still in place and were still encouraged when I was a student, as was taking history classes after they were no longer required. The only class that was required all four years of high school was English, but I took at science, math and history every year as well, starting out with taking the basics that were required and moving into more specialized subjects my senior year of high school. I also always took a class that was in the art program and took foreign language three out of my four years in high school.

One of the aspects of my background that I’m afraid could hinder me as a teacher, is the lack of cultural diversity that I’ve experienced, and the fact that my high school was relatively small and I have no experience in a larger school. My graduating class at 54 students, and most of my classes in high school had no more than 18 kids, which is rare once you get further and further away from rural Maine. But also, I know that in my own experience, having teachers who are actually interested in teaching and are fascinated by the things they are teaching, always interested me more in my learning, so I would be able to bring those positive traits into my classroom to help my students be more interested in the subject matter.

I have always known that I wanted to be a teacher. I don’t remember exactly when I realized this, but it’s something that I had always dreamed about, even as a little girl. I played school with the chalkboard in my (and later my brother’s) bedroom, always making my dolls go to school and learn. As I got older, I dabbled in other interests, I considered nursing and interior decorating (two extremely different things from both each other, and also teaching) but when it came time to think about applying for college, I knew I wanted to go into education. I have always loved learning, even through my struggles in my education, and I’m grateful to the teachers that reminded me how much I love learning and want to give that to kids.

There are a lot of traits that I think make up a superior teacher, but two that really stand out to me are, being passionate about the things that you’re teaching and believing that all students have the opportunity to succeed. One of the most hurtful things that ever happened to me when I was a student is when my sophomore history teacher told me that he didn’t believe I should take AP US History, as he didn’t believe I was at the right level in my learning to understand the material and I never want one of my students to feel that way. I want all my students to feel like they have the opportunity to succeed, even if they fumble or struggle. I will be sure to always encourage my students, and help them work through any struggles they might have, always making sure they know how much potential they hold. Passion is another thing that I think is extremely important and something I hope I can bring to every single one of my classes, even if the subject is something that doesn’t necessarily interest me, I will find something about it that does and present it to my students in a way that gets them excited about the subject and interests them beyond just what we’re learning in the classroom. I want to inspire learning in my classroom through the passion that I bring in my teaching.

By being a teacher, I hope that I gain more and more years of learning and experiencing things I didn’t think I would be able to. Learning has always been my favorite thing, and I think that with all the things that our students can learn from us, we can learn from them. I hope through my teaching and being a teacher, I can gain new insights on the world, and on life. Even the things that are hard, I want to experience them, and gain an outlook on life that I wouldn’t have had before. Being a teacher, I’ll get to meet all kinds of kids, who come from different backgrounds, have different likes and dislikes and ways that they learn and things that interest them and things that they don’t care about, and they all will have something to teach me. Just as I will with them.

While I am unsure now, if anything that I do will change the world of education forever, I hope that the contribution that I have on the profession, is my passion for my subject and my students. I hope that if I teach in one place for a long time, that people will remember me for the passion I brought to my classroom and how much I cared about my students. While, it would be amazing to change something in the world of education, I also would be just as pleased if my impact and contribution to education is being a kind, caring and passionate teacher.

One of my greatest fears, is that during my first year of teaching I’ll bite off way more than I can chew and end up drowning. I’m someone who always takes on way more than I can handle, without even meaning to. I fear, that in my first year I’ll volunteer myself to do things in the school, try and overwork myself and help everyone that I can and end up crashing and burning before the school year is over, because I tried to do too many things all at once. I’m also very concerned that there will be things that I won’t be able to help my students with, just about anything in general. Most of my fears and concerns about teaching and being a teacher, have to do with students not being able to come to me, or me not being able to be there for my students, in a way that they need me to be.

Despite all this, I know that teaching is exactly the place that I want to be and I have absolutely no doubts that being a teacher is what I’m going to be for the rest of my life.